

THE URBAN SKETCHING HANDBOOK

WORKING WITH COLOR

Techniques for Using Watercolor and Color Media on the Go



SHARI
BLAUKOPF

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INTRODUCTION

There's nothing more exciting than a sketching palette filled with fresh paint. For me, it's a box of candy. Acid yellows, shiny reds, deep blues. My brush hovers eagerly over the paints as I decide where to dip first. And when I finally do make the plunge, there's nothing more beautiful than that first stroke of color on a sheet of bright white paper. Can you tell that I love color? I've even caught myself driving and mixing the colors of a passing scene in my head—which seems a bit crazy as I think about it, but it's true.

Urban sketching is about engaging with the world around you, truly seeing all its riches and taking the time to capture them on paper. Whether you're in a crowded market in an exotic locale or sitting under the cool shade of a tree near home, you're surrounded by color—from bright and saturated to soft and muted. Every day and every scene is different.

We all have our own sense of color. It's reflected in how we dress, furnish our homes, and, of course, pick colors for our sketches. Color choices are as unique as our drawing style. But that doesn't mean we can't try new things—in fact, we should always be exploring new ways to express what we see. That's what this book is about.

Working with Color is not a technical guidebook. There are plenty of those on the market. Instead, my goal is to give you stimulating ideas about how to integrate expressive color into your sketches. Whether you work in pencil, ink, watercolor, or some combination of these, the tips and illustrations in these pages, drawn from an international gallery of sketchers, will inspire you to try new techniques and give you a fresh perspective on the colors in your sketch bag.



Seek out color right where you live. I found this purple door on one of the Victorian houses that line Montreal's Carré St. Louis, and sat in the park across the street to sketch the door itself and the lively morning shadows that crossed it.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Purple Door

10.5" × 8.25" | 26.7 × 21 cm; *Ink and watercolor*



Color can sing, speak, or whisper. In early spring, I captured the soft colors of the foliage surrounding this maple, noting the subtle changes of greens and reds from one plant to the next.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Spring Maple

11.5" x 9" | 29 x 22.8 cm; *Watercolor and pencil*



There's great, understated beauty in neutral colors. From a café window across the street, I sketched the dilapidated façade of Crystal... whatever it once was.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Crystal

5.4" × 8.25" | 13.3 × 21 cm; *Ink and watercolor*

KEY I

BASICS

Urban sketching is by definition spontaneous and immediate. In my case, I'll often pause to sketch on my way to work or other outings. Having the right tools at hand makes it easier, and also means I'm likely to sketch more often. If my sketching bag is packed and by the door, I'm ready for whatever the day brings—even if it means sketching in my car on a cold day. After years of trying out different tools, I've reduced my kit to the essentials.

Because I never know whether I'll be spending fifteen minutes on a pen drawing or an hour on a watercolor, my compact sketch bag holds pens, pencils, a small watercolor palette, a few water bottles, and several sizes of sketchbooks. With time, seasoned sketchers pare down their supplies to what they use most often. Whether you're drawing near home or taking your kit overseas, you want to be as mobile as possible, which means less fussing with tools, more time sketching.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

Corner to Corner

8.25" x 8.25" | 21 x 21 cm; *Ink and watercolor*

Keep Your Palette Compact

There's no shortage of small watercolor palettes on the market. Many good ones come prefilled with half-pans of color, but I prefer to fill empty half-pans with fresh paint using my favorite colors. My basic kit includes a small enameled metal palette with a tray and three wells for mixing paint, as well as twenty-three spots for color. A small thumb ring under the box makes holding the palette that much easier. I also keep a few bulldog clips handy for attaching the palette to my sketchbook, in case I'm standing on a street corner to sketch.

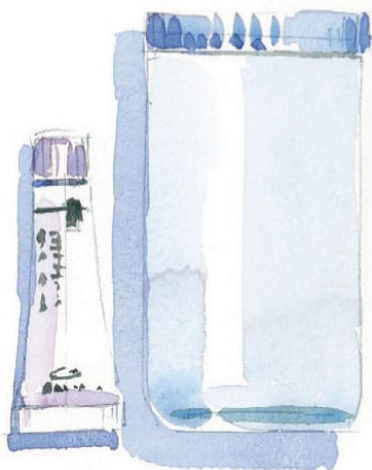


Make sure you have plenty of space for creating a wash. With three wells for mixing, my palette keeps washes of different colors separate. (See [here](#) for my preferred colors.)

Dried-out Paint

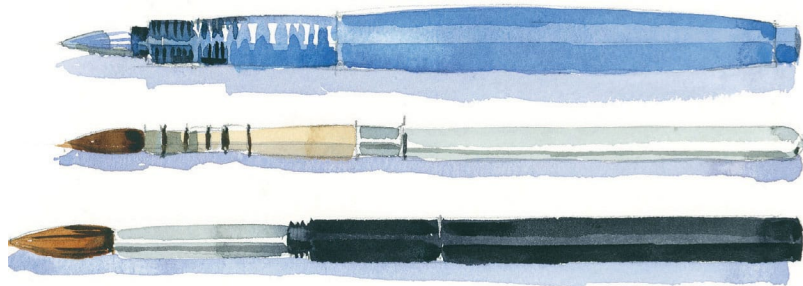
If your half-pan colors dry out in your palette, spray them with a little clean water, wait ten minutes, and see if they freshen up and release saturated color again. If they're so dry the cakes are cracked, it's time to buy some fresh paint!

Brushes and Water



One or two travel brushes are all you need for most urban sketching. Investing in a good-quality travel brush, synthetic or sable, is money well spent. If it has a good point and holds lots of wash, it should last a long time. Look for models that allow you to store the brush in the handle, to maintain that point. And once you're done, always wash your brushes with clear water and shake off excess moisture to further prolong their useful life.

A plastic water brush (a brush tip with a water reservoir) is another good addition to your sketch kit. While it's not my brush of choice, because the tip doesn't hold enough wash, it's handy if you're using water-soluble inks or pencils and want to wet small areas of a sketch. It's also handy when you're traveling by air and can't carry lots of water.



In addition, a basic sketch kit should include a couple of small leakproof water bottles (one for painting and one for cleaning brushes) and a small spray bottle for refreshing dried-out paint on your palette. I also carry a tiny tube of Titanium White watercolor for adding small details and highlights. I simply dip my brush directly into the tube and dab some white onto my sketches.



If you plan on adding color to your sketch, keep ink lines to a minimum. You want to leave room for colorful patches of dark paint.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

From Tuna Wharf

11.3" × 6" | 28.7 × 15.24 cm; Ink and watercolor

Pack Some Pens and Pencils

It's always better to have choices. Because I can't anticipate whether I'll want to sketch in ink or pencil, I carry five drawing tools in my sketch bag (from top): a fountain pen with a flexible nib, filled with permanent ink; a black fine-tipped permanent marker; a white gel pen for fine lines on windows, boat masts, etc.; a mechanical pencil with a soft B lead; and a brush pen filled with water-soluble black ink.





A brush pen enables you to create both lines and dark tones. And unlike a pen nib, the soft, flexible tip produces a line that varies from very thin to very thick.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

The "EI"

11.5" × 8" | 29.2 × 20.3 cm; *Brush pen and ink*

Draw in Color

Urban sketchers often draw in places where wet media are not permitted, such as art museums. Think about carrying water-soluble pencils or graphite. I often take a break in the museum café and use my water brush to wet the pencil lines, releasing rich color and tone.





Good-quality water-soluble pencils are highly versatile. Add some clear water to the pencil strokes to unleash vibrant colors, and mix your colors right on the paper, as I did here using a triad of Dark Ultramarine, Purplish Red, and Gold Cadmium Yellow.

Color Vocabulary

Learning a few key terms will help you better understand how to use color effectively in your sketches.

Value. The lightness or darkness of a color.

Hue. The name of the color.

Intensity/Saturation. How bright or dull a color is.

Local color. The natural color of an object when it's not influenced by light or shadow.

Primary colors. Red, yellow, and blue—the colors we need to make all other colors. Primaries can't be produced by combining other colors.

Secondary colors. Orange, green, and purple—the colors we get by mixing two primary colors.

Tertiary colors. What we get by mixing a primary color with a secondary color.

Triad. Three colors equally spaced on the color wheel.

Complementary colors. Colors that are directly opposite each other on the color wheel.

Analogous colors. Colors that are next to each other on the color wheel.

Neutral. A color not associated with any hue.

Monochromatic. A color scheme that uses tints of a single hue.



This maple in my neighborhood has a perfect domed shape because it hasn't had branches lopped off by the power company. Every autumn I sketch it as it slowly changes color, using an analogous color scheme of mostly orange-yellow, yellow, and yellow-green.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

My Favourite Tree

8.25" × 8.25" | 21 × 21 cm; Watercolor



Mixing two complementary colors (for example, orange and blue, or red and green) creates a neutral—or, as some would have it, "mud." But I think of neutrals as complex and luminous colors in their own right, with rich possibilities in urban settings.

Exercise: Create a Color Wheel

To get better acquainted with your pigments, try creating a color wheel with the paints in your palette. With a pencil, make outer and inner circles and divide the space between the circles into twelve sections. Using fresh paint, start with the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue). Fill the first section with a neutral yellow (like Hansa Yellow), skip three sections and fill with a bright blue (like Cobalt), then skip another three sections and fill with a bright red (like Cadmium Red). Try to keep your washes even and not too diluted. Next, fill in the secondary colors (orange, green, and purple). These are spaced evenly between the primary colors, with blank sections between each. I used Cadmium Orange, Phthalo Green, and Carbazole Violet. When these are dry, complete the color wheel by mixing and painting the tertiary colors, such as blue-green and yellow-orange. The proficiency you gain in mixing colors for a color wheel will really help you when you're sketching on location.



Paper and Sketchbooks

Sketchbooks come in a wide range of formats, paper thicknesses, and bindings. Sometimes the choices can seem overwhelming. I work most often in watercolor, so I like a paper that has a bit of texture and won't warp even if I apply several layers of wash. I sometimes go on location with two sizes of sketchbook, usually hardcover ones that fit easily into my sketch bag. My best advice: Find a sketchbook that suits your sketching style. If you're using dry media, such as pens or pencils, pick a thinner sheet. And if you plan on scanning your sketches, make sure the binding is stitched to prevent the pages from falling out as you flatten them on the scanner.



My sketchbook of choice is 8.25" x 8.25" (21 x 21 cm). I like the square format of a single page (as in the sketch of *Peveril of the Peak* at left) and appreciate the potential for using a two-page spread for panoramic views, such as *Long Beach* in Cape Ann, Massachusetts (below).

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Peveril of the Peak, Manchester

8.25" x 8.25" | 21 x 21 cm; *Ink and watercolor*



There's always a really tiny sketchbook in my bag wherever I go because I never know when I'll have a few minutes to sketch while waiting for a friend in a café. After my initial pen drawing, I love being able to add white highlights with chalk or white gouache to the toned paper.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Studio 77

7" x 5" | 17.8 x 12.7 cm; *Ink, watercolor, and white chalk on toned paper*

Paper Doesn't Have to Be White

Consider using toned paper. It gives you a middle value as a starting point, to which you add lights and darks. Toned paper will help you think differently about your materials, such as how pastels and gouache can be layered on top of ink or pencil lines. You can find good-quality sketchbooks in gray, tan, or even black paper.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

Long Beach, Massachusetts

16.5" × 8.25" | 42 × 21 cm; *ink and watercolor*

KEY II

PIGMENTS & COLOR MIXING

There are no rights and wrongs when choosing colors for your palette, because all sketchers have their favorites. But it is helpful to think ahead for different situations. For example, I sometimes add more blues and turquoises to my palette if I'm traveling to the tropics, or swap in some earth tones if I'm headed for the mountains. But when it comes right down to it, I could probably sketch my way through any latitude and elevation with just three tubes of paint: a cool red, a deep blue, and a bright yellow. With those three pigments I can mix an infinite range of brights, darks, and neutrals.

The important thing is to have pigments in your palette that you really understand. Are they opaque or transparent? Staining or liftable? Do they granulate and are they lightfast? There's certainly no shortage of books written about the hundreds of pigments out there. So, in addition to testing your colors on scraps of paper, read up or look online to learn more about the personalities of your favorite pigments.

I also spend a fair bit of time spying—that is, looking over the shoulders of my sketching friends to see what's in their palettes. The more you know, the more confident you'll be as a colorist.



How to Choose Your Colors

Hundreds of watercolor pigments crowd the market. So how to choose? If you're new to urban sketching, simply buy a small travel palette filled with a dozen half-pans of student-grade basic colors. You'll be able to sketch in any situation.

With experience, you'll want a wider range of pigments, so you could invest in artist-quality pans or tubes. But don't lock yourself into a final selection. In fact, I'm constantly swapping colors because I love to experiment. Here's what my 23-pan palette currently holds.

YELLOWS AND ORANGES



Hansa Yellow



New Gamboge

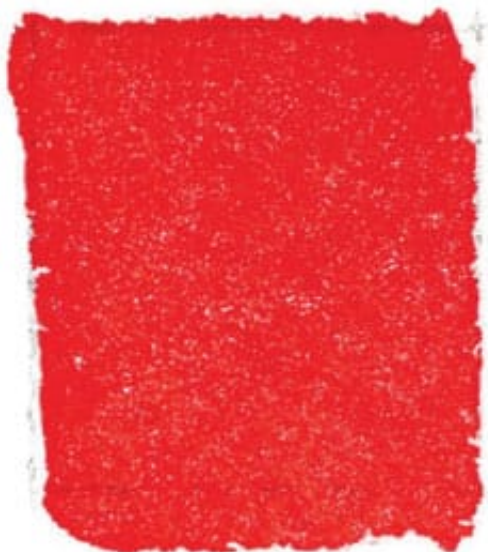


Quinacridone Gold



Transparent Orange

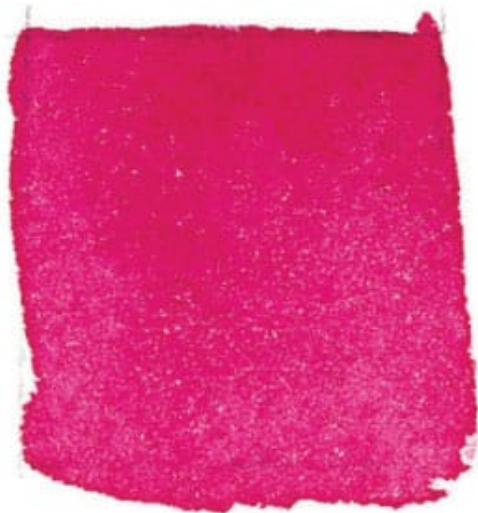
REDS, PINKS, AND PURPLES



Cadmium Red



Permanent Alizarin Crimson

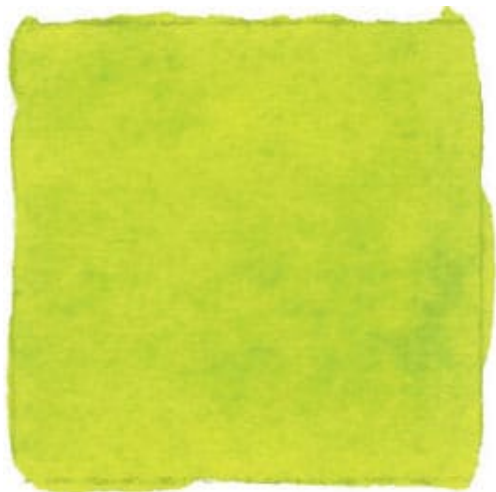


Quinacridone Rose

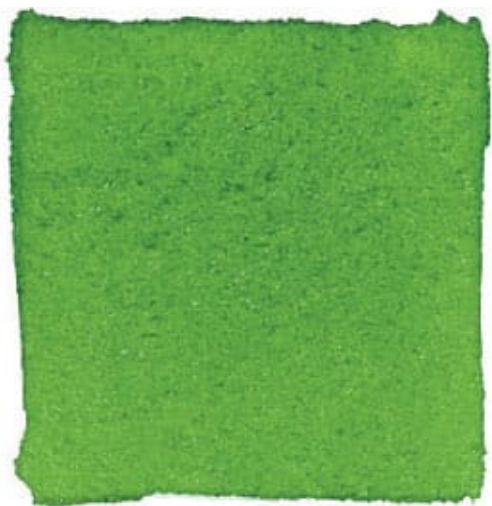


Carbazole Violet

GREENS



Leaf Green



Sap Green



Phthalo Green

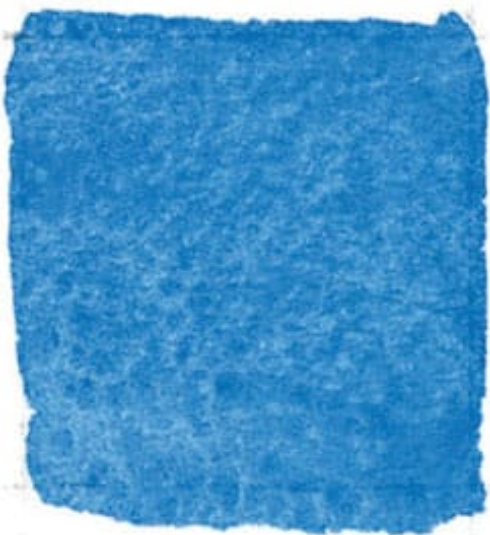


Forest Green

BLUES



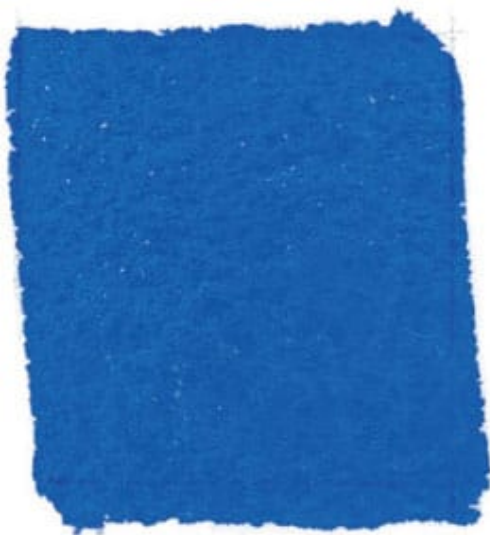
Cobalt Teal



Cerulean Blue



Cobalt Blue



Ultramarine Blue



Prussian Blue



Indanthrene Blue

EARTH TONES



Burnt Sienna



Raw Sienna



Yellow Ochre

DARKS



Indigo



Lunar Black

Student-Grade vs. Artist-Quality Watercolor

Student-grade paint is cheaper because it contains less pigment and more filler, making some colors unstable or unpredictable. Artist-quality paint has a higher pigment concentration, so less goes a lot further.

Watercolor Techniques

Brush some clear water on your paper, drop pure color into it, and watch what happens. That's the excitement of watercolor. You never know what your washes will look like until they dry because so many factors affect the outcome—from humidity, sun, and wind to paper texture and the amount of water on your brush.

Practice, practice, practice. Try out these techniques, preferably on some scrap paper:



GRADATED WASH

Load brush with fresh pigment and make a horizontal stroke. Repeat, adding clear water with each stroke so the wash is increasingly diluted. This is great practice for painting blue skies on a clear day.



BLENDED WASH

Load brush with pigment and make a horizontal stroke. Make a second stroke with another color, partly overlapping the first. The area in the middle will create a third color.



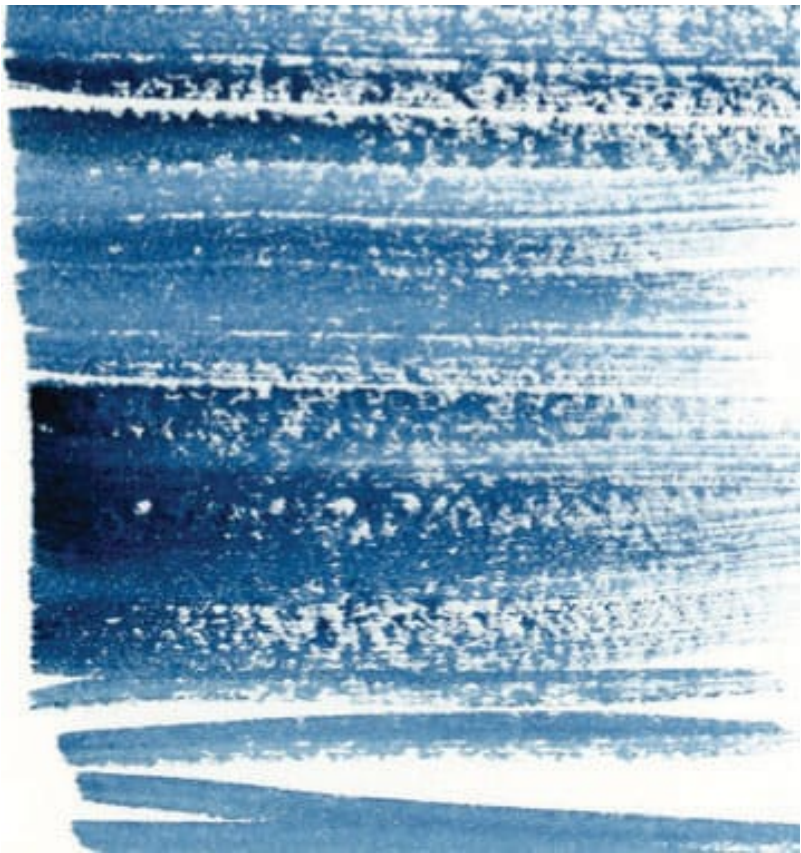
GLAZING

Glazing creates beautiful effects with transparent colors. To start, make horizontal strokes with several warm colors. When these dry, make vertical strokes with cooler colors and see luminous tones appear in the overlapping areas.



WET-IN-WET

Make a puddle of clear water on your paper and drop different colors on either side. Allow the pigments to mingle. This is the very essence—and magic—of watercolor!



DRY BRUSH

Dip your brush in pigment and wipe off excess moisture on a towel. Next, drag the dry brush across your paper. The more textured your paper, the more striking the effect.



SPATTER

I often use spatter to create texture in trees, foreground roads, and vegetation. Dip an old toothbrush in paint and scrape the bristles with your finger to spatter the paper.

Techniques in Practice

Once you're out on location, you'll find plenty of opportunity to test-drive some of these techniques. For example, here's a scene I sketched in early spring in Hudson, Quebec, when the snow had mostly melted in the muddy fields and the rich grays of the weathered barn contrasted with the muted tones of distant hills.

Wet-in-wet: For the soft clouds, I first wet the sky with a diluted wash of Raw Sienna, and then dropped in grays made from Cerulean Blue mixed with a bit of Alizarin Crimson.

Lost edges: Look for places in your sketch where one area can gently merge with another. I painted the distant hills while the sky was still wet, allowing the warm and cool washes to run into each other.



Gradated wash: The ochre-colored spring ground starts off darker at the top and gets paler as it descends.

Dry brush: I used different dry brush techniques throughout this sketch, particularly on the barn and in the foreground. Some marks are bigger and some smaller, but they're all created by dragging dry brushes of different sizes over the textured paper.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Spring Field

15" x 11" | 38 x 28 cm; Watercolor

Every Day a Different Sky

Skies are eloquent about the mood of the day, even when they occupy just a modest patch in your composition. To create a sense of unity, think about using colors in your sky that appear elsewhere in your composition. And because clouds are naturally soft edged, this is a great opportunity to practice your wet-in-wet technique.



For a blue sky with a few white clouds, wet the paper with clear water, and then, starting at the top, drop in some Cobalt Blue. As you move down, add Cerulean Blue. Leave some unpainted paper for the tops of the clouds, and for the undersides, mix your blue with some Burnt Sienna to get a neutral gray.



Not every sky is blue. To capture the warmth of an early-morning or late-day sky, wet the paper with a mixture of Hansa Yellow and Raw Sienna. As you move downward with your brush, warm up the color with a bit of Quinacridone Rose. Brush in some mauve clouds while the paper is still wet, using horizontal strokes of Cobalt Blue combined with Quinacridone Rose.



How often have you been caught in an unexpected thundershower while sketching? To capture the drama of threatening clouds, wet your paper with a diluted wash of Raw Sienna. This will add warmth to the sky and contrast with the cool darks of the clouds. While the sky is still wet, drop in some Indigo mixed with a drop of Permanent Alizarin Crimson. If the clouds aren't dark enough, don't be afraid to go back in with more Indigo.

Painting Skies

After you've painted a wet sky wash, note how the paper starts to lose its glisten. At that point, leave it alone. If you add more water to the damp surface, you'll get unwanted "blossoms" (or "blooms") in your sky.

Enrich Your Sketches with Darks

The secret to achieving luminous and vibrant darks is to use fresh paint. If you have to add lots of water to dried paint, you're merely diluting your pigments and you'll struggle to get rich-enough darks. I love to mix darks from the jewel-like colors on my palette: Permanent Alizarin Crimson, Phthalo Green, Prussian Blue, and Ultramarine Blue. Practice combining these on a scrap of paper, and don't be afraid to experiment with two colors you can't imagine going well together. You might be surprised!



Permanent Alizarin Crimson & Indigo



Permanent Alizarin Crimson & Phthalo Green



Permanent Alizarin Crimson & Ultramarine Blue



Sap Green & Ultramarine Blue



Sap Green & Carbazole Violet



Sap Green & Permanent Alizarin Crimson



Cadmium Red & Indigo



Cadmium Red & Ultramarine Blue



Cadmium Red & Sap Green



Burnt Sienna & Prussian Blue



Burnt Sienna & Ultramarine Blue



Burnt Sienna & Carbazole Violet

Mix Up Greens for Every Tree and Shrub

Urban green spaces are the perfect arena for developing your color-mixing chops. You'll be astounded at the sheer range of foliage hues you can achieve by mixing pairs of blues, greens, and yellows. Closely observe the trees and shrubs in front of you—some greens are grayish, others more yellow or darkly somber—and see how many you can match. In this sketch of the Fish House in Vancouver's Stanley Park (below), check out my recipes for green, and note how I've also added accents of complementary red to really enliven the foliage colors.

1



RAW SIENNA & CERULEAN BLUE

A beautiful combination for gray-green foliage, hosta leaves, and olive trees.

2



PHTHALO GREEN & NEW GAMBOGE

A bright, grassy green for midsummer lawns and vegetation.

3



HANSA YELLOW & ULTRAMARINE BLUE

This dark yellow-green is perfect for sunstruck foliage.

4



PRUSSIAN BLUE & NEW GAMBOGE

A deep, rich green for foliage in shade.

5



HANSA YELLOW & PRUSSIAN BLUE

An electric yellow-green for early spring buds.

6



PRUSSIAN BLUE & BURNT SIENNA

Adding a reddish brown to blue creates an intense dark blue-green for evergreens.



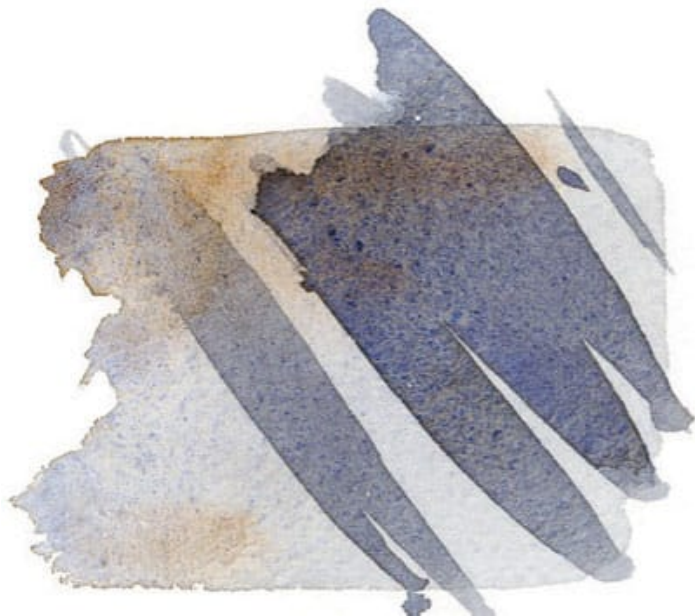
SHARI BLAUKOPF

Fish House, Vancouver, Canada

8.25" × 16.5" | 21 × 41.5 cm; Watercolor and pencil

Mix Color for Shadows

I love sketching outdoors on a sunny day because of the extra dimension shadows add to walls, windows, and doorways. Spend a leisurely moment looking at shadows and you'll notice how their colors change as they move across different surfaces or as they get closer to the ground. You'll often see faint pencil lines under the painted shadows in my sketches. These indicate the direction and shapes of the shadows, which I record before adding color in case the light changes.





Shadows are a good opportunity to try glazing technique. In this sketch of a house on Montreal's Carré St. Louis, I began by painting the local colors of the surfaces. I used Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Sienna for the stone, allowing some of the color to mix right on the paper. Once that was dry, I mixed a darker version of the same colors for the shadows.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Red Door on the Square

7.7" × 10.3" | 19.5 × 26 cm; Ink and watercolor

Tip

Don't be stingy with paint and water when painting shadows. Get lots of the shadow color on your brush and paint with a juicy wash, starting in an upper corner and painting downward until you reach the end of the shape. And remember: the shapes will be more convincing if painted with confidence and speed.

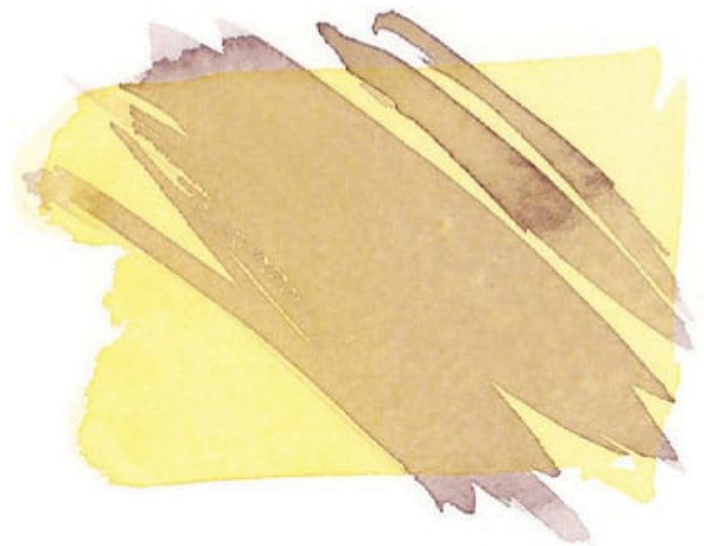


Use the mixes already on your palette to create your shadow color. For this scene in Lachine, Quebec, I created a mix for the brick buildings using Quinacridone Rose, Hansa Yellow, and Cobalt Blue. For the shadows under the eaves and balconies, I added more blue and rose to the puddle of wash on my palette, thereby deepening and cooling the color.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Rue St. Joseph

8.25" x 8.25" | 21 x 21 cm; Ink and watercolor





Shadows on yellow can be tricky. If you darken the yellow, it can appear muddy or opaque, and shadows work best when they're transparent. My solution is to use the complementary color (purple) instead. In this sketch, I added a small drop of Carbazole Violet to my yellow wash for the shadow color.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Yellow Porch

8" x 10" | 20.3 x 25.4 cm; Watercolor and pencil

KEY III

COLOR & VALUE

Values are the spice of any sketch. Or, to use a more visually apt metaphor, the salt and pepper. A sketch composed entirely of middle value tones will look flat or unfinished. The eye wanders, seeking and failing to find a point of interest. But add a few darks and... it pops!

You can't really talk about sketching in color without talking about values—the colors' relative lightness or darkness. So what do these all-important lights and darks do? They inject contrast and variety. More importantly, they create a focal point—a place that draws and rewards the eye.

There are many ways to create contrasting values in your sketches, particularly if you choose materials that allow you to build up darks through a full range of values, such as watercolor, ink, graphite, or pastels.

I always say that I learn best from my own mistakes. So, yes, I am guilty of sometimes adding too much dark paint to a sketch. But that's how I learn when enough is enough, and how to create the perfectly “seasoned” sketch.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

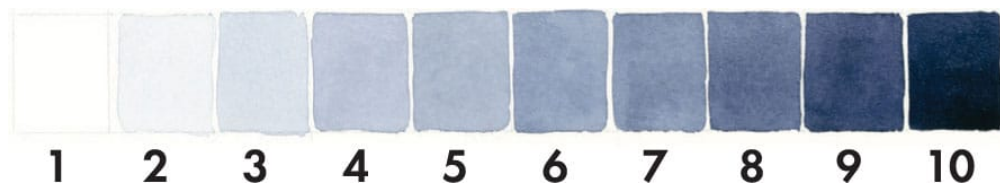
After the Snow

8" x 10" | 20 x 25 cm; Watercolor and pencil

From the Whitest White to the Darkest Dark

To better understand values, try working in monochrome. In fact, I often return to monochrome after a break from sketching to restore my sense for values. Whether you're using ink, graphite, markers, or watercolor, make sure you choose a pigment that's dark enough to yield a full range of lights and darks. Two of my favorites are Payne's Grey and Indigo watercolor.

As you observe your subject, compare one portion to another to see which is darker. Keep in mind that a light object in shade (like a white house) can sometimes appear darker than a dark structure in sun (like a red-tiled roof). This form of fine observation can be challenging at first, but will eventually reward you with color sketches that contain a full range of tonal values.



In this basic value scale, #1 represents the white of the paper and #10 is the darkest you can get with the paint you're using. A great way to practice control over your washes is to create a similar scale using a dark pigment, such as Indigo or Payne's Grey. I started my value scale with the lightest square (#2) and gradually added more pigment until I achieved a dark black (#10).



In his watercolor of a kiosk in a Chicago park, Renato Palmuti clearly defines light, dark, and middle values by painting large shapes and stripping away details. The light value of the buildings in the background supplies a sense of distance in this cityscape.

RENATO PALMUTI

Kiosk near Buckingham Fountain, Chicago

5" x 7.5" | 13 x 19 cm; Watercolor in Moleskine sketchbook



Lights and darks can be used to create depth or to differentiate parts of a sketch. Look at how effectively Nina Johansson separates foreground from background in this Chicago sketch by using a range of gray markers—pale gray for the background and darker gray for the foreground.

NINA JOHANSSON

Wabash Avenue from Goddess and the Baker Bakery

11.5" × 8.25" | 39.5 × 29 cm; Gray and black Fineliner pens, Pitt Artist brush pens



In this tonal drawing using graphite pencils, Eduardo Bajzek creates focus by nesting the lightest areas (the roofs) within the darkest shadows. Meanwhile, the figures, benches, and trees mass together in a soft, middle-value gray tone.

EDUARDO BAJZEK

Cristalino Lodge, Mato Grosso, Brazil

9" x 12" | 22.8 x 30.5 cm; *Graphite pencils*

Tip

A convenient way to fill in values is to use grayscale markers, which are available in a wide range of tones.

Save the White

If you plan your sketch—and the whites—before applying color, you'll find there's nothing more powerful than the visual punch of unpainted paper. Whether you reserve white for shapes inside your frame or to create a vignette around a subject, clean white adds freshness and luminosity.

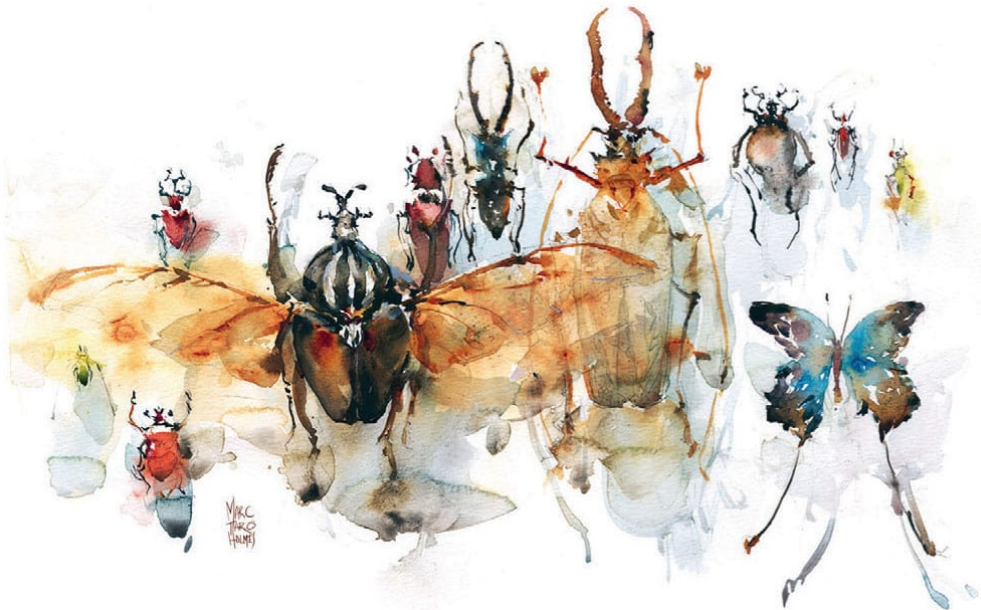


I've been told that painting snow is "easy" because you only have to apply color to half the sketch. But for the white to work effectively, think carefully about the size of each white shape.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Rowan Avenue

10" x 11" | 25.4 x 28 cm; Ink and watercolor



You don't have to paint right to the edge of the paper. Working from larger to smaller shapes, Marc Taro Holmes groups the bugs in his insectarium sketch toward the middle of the sheet and lets the soft watercolor shadows define the edges.

MARC TARO HOLMES

Montreal Insectarium, 2018

15" x 20" | 38 x 50 cm; Graphite and watercolor



Light shapes appear even more dramatic when framed by darks, like these dormers on Sea Gull Cottage, the oldest house in Palm Beach, Florida.

GIL ZARINS

Sea Gull Cottage

7.5" x 11" | 19 x 28 cm; Watercolor on Arches 300 lb cold press paper

Tip

If you forget to leave small areas of white, use a few lines of white gel pen or some dots of pure white watercolor to add interest to dark areas in your sketch.

Place Darks Strategically

Painting large dark areas can be daunting. Go too dark and there's no turning back. Go too dry and you risk going lifeless—without any chance to resuscitate. So don't be afraid to load up with strong pigment on a big, wet brush. You may be surprised to see that the moment you add the dark areas, your sketch comes to life!



Darks don't have to be black. Use a rich, deep blue, red, or purple to add visual interest to the darkest shapes in your sketch.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Red Boat

8" × 8" | 20.3 × 20.3 cm; Pencil and watercolor



Deep greens are punctuated by sharp white shapes. Clearly, careful thought went into the size, shape, and placement of the dark areas in this sketch.

UMA KELKAR

What's on the Roofs?

15" x 22" | 38 x 56 cm; Watercolor



Notice how the zigzag of shadows and darks at the center of the sketch lead the eye right into the building entrance.

TONY UNDERHILL

Tudor Gatehouse, Smithfield, London

5" x 8" | 13 x 20 cm; *Ultrafine Sharpie and watercolor on Moleskine watercolor notebook*

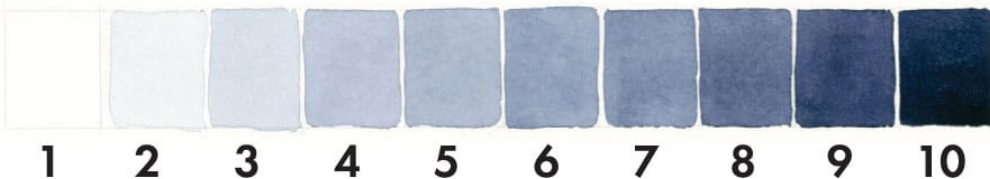
Tip

When looking for a subject to sketch, instead of picking an object or a building, choose instead a location with plenty of contrasts and a variety of light and dark shapes.

Experiment with Values in the Lighter Range

High-key color is when the majority of values in your sketch range from whites to midtones, with very few darks. High-key sketches have a light, airy feel. If you're sketching on an early spring morning when the leaves are just coming out, surrender to the mood and use high-key values. This doesn't mean you can't use dark colors in a high-key sketch. Just add a little more water to the paint than you normally would.

High key values



The excitement of spring positively bursts from this joyous sketch of a suburban neighborhood.

WAYNE BISSKY

View West on Clarke Street, Port Moody, BC

5" x 16" | 12.7 x 40.6 cm; Watercolor on Pentelic watercolor sketchbook

"On the fly, it's important to focus on the basics. In this example, I stopped on a recent bike ride to make this watercolor sketch, and focused entirely on color and simplicity of shape."

—Mark Alan Anderson



Be prepared for sketching wherever you go. Mark Alan Anderson takes a brush, sketchbook, and watercolors with him on bike rides into the countryside.

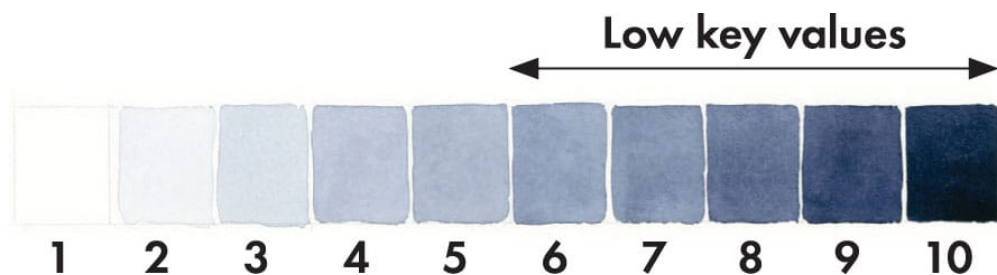
MARK ALAN ANDERSON

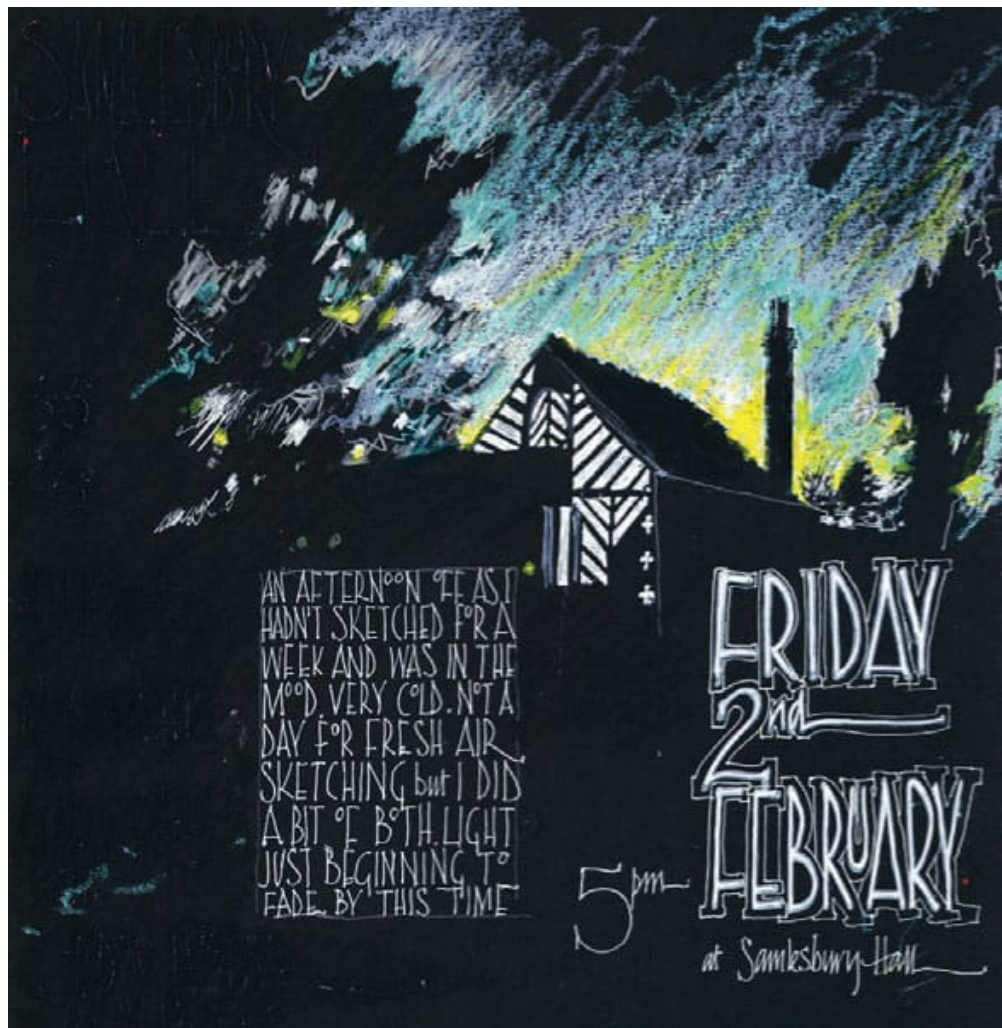
Old Route 210, near Liberty, Missouri

15" x 7.4" | 38 x 19 cm; Watercolor and pencil on Strathmore Aquarius II watercolor paper

Choose Dark Values for Mood

Dramatic, *moody*, and *mysterious* are words that typically describe low-key color sketches, when the values fall mostly in the middle to dark range. Think of night scenes, dimly lit interiors, and cityscapes at dusk. Use the darkest, richest pigments in your palette to create a low-key sketch. And after you've added in all the dark values, remember to leave space for small patches of light and bright color for contrast.





Using white text and small areas of bright color on black paper, Pat Southern-Pearce evokes the atmosphere of a cold winter night.

PAT SOUTHERN-PEARCE

Samlesbury Hall

12" x 12" | 30.5 x 30.5 cm; Broad White Mitsubishi Signo Uniball, Inktense, and Caran D'Ache watercolor pencils and Peter Pauper watercolor crayons on Seawhite of Brighton Black sketchbook



Think from dark to light. Susanne Strater starts with dark blue pastel paper and then adds black for the tree silhouettes. But it's the soft glow of yellow that captures the imagination and invites us into the home's warm interior.

SUSANNE STRATER

Winter's Coming

18" x 18" | 45.7 x 45.7 cm; Pastel on paper

Exercise: Same Scene, Different Values

Try sketching the same scene in different value schemes—one high-key and one low-key. Do they convey different moods?



I had no option but to use dark tones to quickly sketch Galway's Spanish Arch—storm clouds and heavy rain were quickly moving my way.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Spanish Arch, Galway, Ireland

6.6" × 10" | 16.7 × 25.4 cm; *Ink and watercolor*

KEY IV

LIMITED COLOR

It seems odd to write a book about color and include a chapter about reducing the number of colors you use. But, despite having palettes filled with several dozen colors, I often severely limit my choices when I'm sketching.

Using a limited palette—and by that I mean narrowing your choices to one, two, or three pigments—immediately solves the perennial problem of which color best represents what you see. Limiting your palette also does three important things. First, it helps you focus on the all-important lights and darks. Second, it enables you to separate out or draw attention to a single area of your sketch. And, finally, it creates chromatic unity and harmony in your sketches.

Once you see the stunning results you get when using a limited palette, I suspect you'll never go back to a full palette again.



MARK ALAN ANDERSON

Cold Weather Sketching

7" x 10" | 17.7 x 25.4 cm; Watercolor and fountain pen on Strathmore Aquarius II watercolor paper

Limit Yourself to One Pen

Not all line drawings have to be black. Grab a sepia marker, a blue ballpoint, or a red pencil to make your mark. Most sketchers I know are wild about art materials, and many of us admit to having far more stuff than we can possibly use. But what about sketching with the most economical of art materials—a ballpoint pen—like Brian Gnyp does? With his deft line and skilled cross-hatching, Brian conveys shape, value, volume, and depth.



New Zealand sketcher Brian Gnyp often chooses ballpoints over other drawing materials because he enjoys the variation in line weight he can achieve with this humble tool. And they don't smudge like pencils do!

BRIAN GNYP

Taranaki Cathedral

11.7" × 8.25" | 29.7 × 21 cm; Red ballpoint pen



Line can be used to describe motion, like Richard Johnson does with a blue ballpoint pen.

RICHARD JOHNSON

Tree on a Windy Hill

4" x 4" | 10 x 10 cm; Blue ballpoint pen



A water-soluble pen—especially in a warm color like sepia—is a highly expressive tool for capturing people in urban settings. I drew John enjoying the sun at a café and touched a water brush to selective parts of the drawing to define the strong shadows on his face and shoulders.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

John at the Café

5" x 8" | 12.7 x 20 cm; *Water-soluble sepia marker*

Be Selective with Color

The best way to understand the colors in your palette is by painting with them one by one. In fact, I do this quite often. Even on the coldest winter day, when I'm trapped at home and have access to the full gamut of pigments, I'll go monochrome. There's a wheelbarrow in my backyard, visible from my kitchen window, that I've painted in all seasons. But my favorite is in winter, when my beloved wheelbarrow is coated with snow. Using a single color—in this case blue—enables me to convey the day's blustery cold.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

Blue Monday

8" x 10" | 20.3 x 25.4 cm; Watercolor and pencil



Line creates the structure, but areas of wash add interest to this museum café scene.

VIRGINIA HEIN

Getty in Red

8.25" × 23" | 30 × 58.4 cm; Colored pencil and watercolor



In this intimate boat sketch, Mike Kowalski explores the full range of light and dark tones using a rich, walnut-colored ink.

MIKE KOWALSKI

Skiffs, Port Hadlock, WA

9" × 12" | 22.8 × 30.4 cm; Tom Norton bamboo pen/brush with Tom Norton walnut ink

Add Emphasis with Spot Color

Sometimes, pure color makes the strongest statement. So take a few moments to think through what you want to say about the day or the scene in front of you. Is there something you want to emphasize? Then choose a contrasting spot color to add a dramatic focus.

Mixing art tools can also make a powerful statement. Create a variety of textures and edges by using ink for one area and wash for another. And to challenge yourself further, when you change tools, change color, too.



Using a red pen to sketch the musicians and a black pen for the sketchers is an ingenious way of separating different parts of this café scene.

NINA JOHANSSON

Lilla Wien

7.5" x 10.5" | 19 x 26 cm; Fude nib fountain pen with black ink, and Red Bic Crystal ballpoint pen



Imagine how different this sketch would have been in full color. By giving prominence to the red lanterns and leaving the rest in tones of gray, Virginia Hein helps us feel the celebratory mood.

VIRGINIA HEIN

Chinese New Year at the Huntington

9" x 12" | 22.8 x 30.5 cm; Pencil and watercolor



William Cordero Hidalgo shows what's possible by varying edges, using hard black lines for the structure of the sketch and watery blue washes for the parking lot reflections.

WILLIAM CORDERO HIDALGO

Parking Lot, Turrialba Town, Cartago, Costa Rica

8.5" x 11" | 21.5 x 27.9 cm; Ink and watercolor

Limit Yourself to Three Colors

It's tempting to use every color in your palette for each sketch, but you'll create a more powerful sense of harmony by limiting your choices. With the right triad of primary colors, you can mix secondary colors as well as an infinite variety of darks and neutrals. You'll also be pleasantly surprised by the serendipitous but just-right hues that appear on your paper.

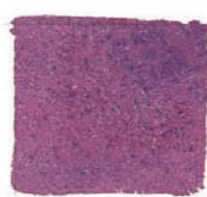


Coal Harbour was painted on an overcast day in Vancouver. With my primary triad of colors (see below), I mixed a full range of greens, both light and dark, as well as some interesting neutrals for the boathouse.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Coal Harbour, Vancouver, Canada

8.25" × 16.5" | 21 × 41.5 cm; Ink and watercolor



↑
**Primary
colors**

↑
**Secondary
mixes**

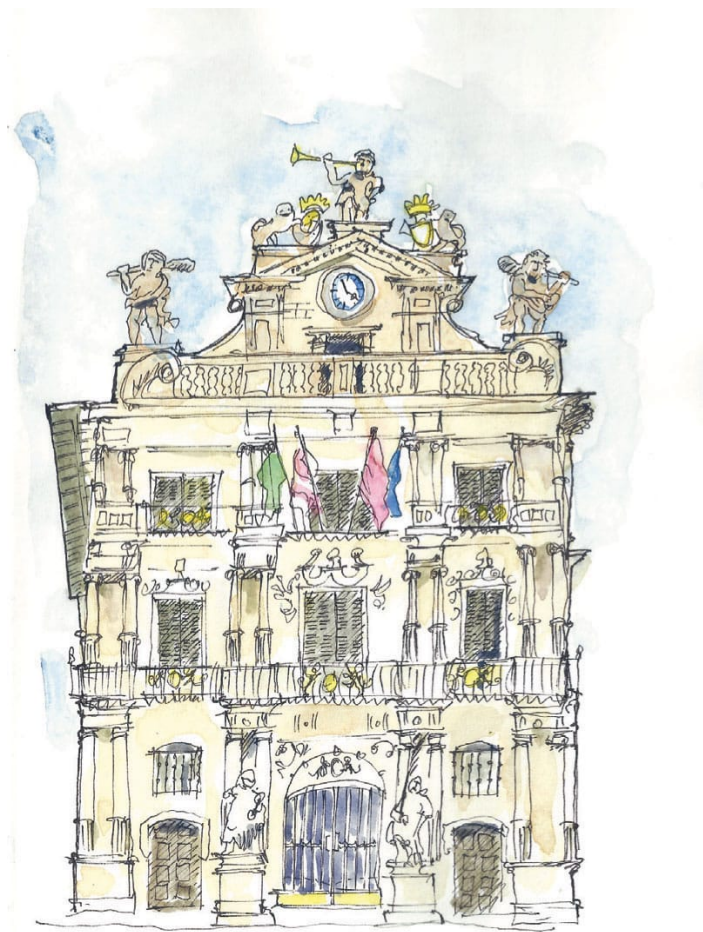
↑
Neutrals

↑
Darks

One of my favorite primary triads (colors equally spaced on the color wheel) consists of Ultramarine Blue, Hansa Yellow, and Permanent Alizarin Crimson. By mixing these in different proportions, I not only get vibrant secondary colors, but just look at the glowing neutral colors and deep darks I'm also able to achieve!

Pack Light

When Ottawa sketcher John Wright was preparing for his five-week trek along the Camino de Santiago in Spain, he knew his sketching gear had to be ultralight. Along with some small sketchbooks, pens, and a few brushes, John carried a small palette and some tubes of primary colors. With minimal gear, he was able to capture the full richness of scenes and characters he encountered along the way.



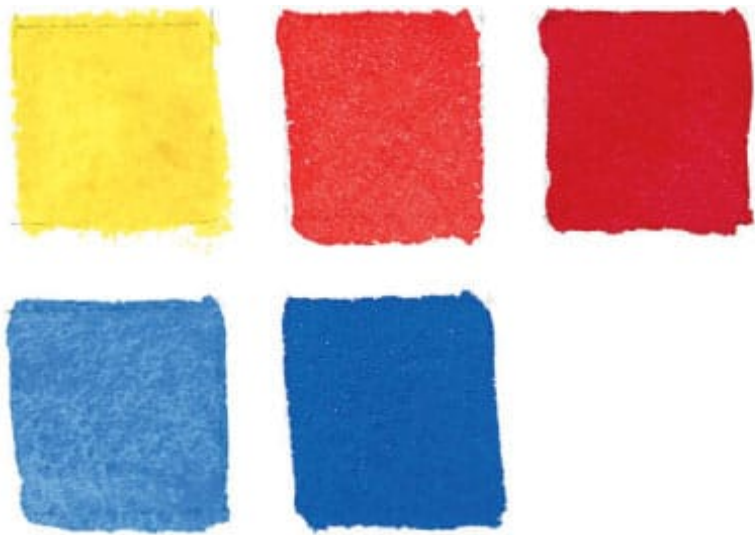
CITY HALL - PAMPLONA

You don't have to paint between the lines. Offsetting the edges of the ink and wash gives a lively effervescence to this sketch of Pamplona's City Hall.

JOHN WRIGHT

City Hall in Pamplona, Spain

5.5" x 7.8" | 14 x 20 cm; Watercolor and ink, Lalaran sketchbook



John's kit included tubes of Aureolin, Cadmium Red, Rose Madder, Cerulean Blue, and Ultramarine Blue.

Tip

Find one of your own sketches that seems inharmonious or has too many colors. Redo it using a limited palette of just three primary colors.

Let Color Surprise You

Although I've provided some suggestions on previous pages, I encourage you to experiment with triads of your own. Open yourself to the surprise of new color combinations—as I was surprised when some Cobalt Teal leaked in my palette. Instead of rinsing it off, I used the bright turquoise blue in all my sketches for the next few weeks. This bit of serendipity led to my discovery of unexpected and harmonious new color combinations.

When choosing colors for a limited palette, I usually start with a primary triad of transparent pigments such as Ultramarine Blue, Hansa Yellow, and Permanent Alizarin Crimson. But for another interesting combo, try opaque colors such as Cerulean Blue, Cadmium Red, and Yellow Ochre. Or even secondary colors like orange, green, and purple. The key is to *experiment!*





Foggy, moody days demand softer colors. For this atmospheric street scene, my color triad was Cerulean Blue, which is lighter and more opaque than Ultramarine Blue, along with Quinacridone Gold and Permanent Alizarin Crimson.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Street Fog

8" x 8" | 20.3 x 20.3 cm; Watercolor and pencil



Winter demands a limited palette. I don't always carry Burnt Umber in my kit, but added some

to paint this tree scene in the cemetery. Initially, I had to look hard to find color in the cloudy landscape. But when the sun came out, everything changed. The contrast in values between trees and snow became sharp, and suddenly there was movement and direction. Indanthrene Blue, Burnt Umber, and some Alizarin made a great dark for the trunks and branches.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Winter Texture

10" x 14" | 25.4 x 35.5 cm; *Watercolor and pencil*





In this spring scene, with its sharp and quite dark shadow areas, I was more interested in capturing values than color. I worked with my favorite limited palette of Ultramarine Blue, Alizarin Crimson, and Hansa Yellow. It still astonishes me that with just these three primary pigments, I can obtain the secondary colors I want—the bright greens of the spring trees, the orangey rust of the wheelbarrow, and the deep purple of the shadows on the shed.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Wheelbarrow and Shed

16" × 8" | 40.6 × 20.3 cm; *Watercolor and pencil*

KEY V

COLOR RELATIONSHIPS

So far we've looked at tonal values and at the building blocks of using color. We've sketched with colors one by one, and in twos and threes. Now let's push our color boundaries further out and begin telling stories in rich, expressive color.

Color can convey mood and powerful emotions. There's a reason people are *tickled pink* or *green with envy*. If you're in a rage you're *seeing red*. And if you're sad you're *feeling blue*.

Color gives you the power to infuse your work with feeling—to stir up passions by using saturated reds and yellows, or to tamp them down with soft blues and mauves.

In this chapter, I'll show you how to use color expressively and with purpose. I'll show you that by modulating color temperature or by using complementary, bold, or even muted color combinations, you'll find your color “voice” and be inspired to tell your own color story.



MARK ALAN ANDERSON

South Withers Road, Liberty, Missouri

5" x 8" | 12.7 x 20.3 cm; Watercolor and fountain pen on Fabriano Artistico watercolor paper

Invite the Viewer in with Warm Colors

What's the best way to inject energy and action into your indoor sketches? Suppose you're in a room full of movement, conviviality, and glowing colors. Dip into your reds, yellows, and oranges—colors on the *warm* side of the color wheel—to capture the mood. In other words, let color *temperature* set the tone. Even if the colors in front of you are not *just* reds and oranges, use expressive license to let these warm colors dominate. Allow the emotion *you* feel to come across on the page.





Feel the warmth emanating from this interior? Yellow, orange, and red tones draw the eye in, while touches of blue on the clothing add contrast.

MIKE KOWALSKI

Naked Winery, Hood River, Oregon

9" x 12" | 22.8 x 30.4 cm; Watercolor



A. Rmyth chose a spot under the TV for the best view of the café customers' faces. Then he proceeded to draw them using a vibrant pattern of overlapping lines in warm colors.

A.RMYTH

Under the TV at "Palais d'Essaouira" Café

16.5" x 11.8" | 42 x 30 cm; ProMarker and Pitt pen liner on drawing paper





The warm colors and gestural brushstrokes convey excitement and exuberance. We can almost hear the music!

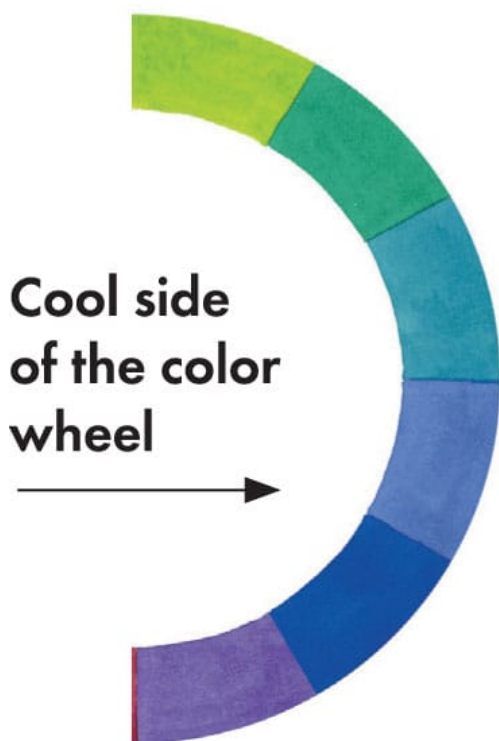
SUHITA SHIRODKAR

Cambrian Symphony Plays *The Planets*

9" x 12" | 22.8 x 30.4 cm; Watercolor, pen, and ink

Feel the Cools of Winter

I use cool, wintry colors—the blues, purples, and greens on the right side of the color wheel—when I want to convey a sense of calm serenity. Where I live, snow covers the landscape for a good part of the year, so I've had plenty of practice with cool colors. I sketch often in my car during winter, dipping my brush into blues and purples to capture chilly neighborhood scenes.



After sketching dozens of snow scenes (and devoting many hours to defrosting my fingers), I've found that Cobalt Blue works best for painting shadows on snow. A good puddle of Cobalt Blue, along with a tiny drop of Permanent Alizarin Crimson, gives me just the right shade of purplish blue to paint my way through anything winter can throw at me.





Susanne Strater juxtaposes cool purple and blue landscape shapes with complementary warm tones for the house and yellow-lit windows.

SUSANNE STRATER

Between

17.5" × 11.5" | 44.4 × 29.2 cm; Pastel on Canson Mi-Teintes pastel paper





There's nothing more tranquil than the muted hush after a big snowfall. I sketched this just after the sun came out, sharpening and deepening the shadow color across the road. Note the warm colors I used as a contrasting element in the background trees.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

House in Shade

11" x 15" | 27.9 x 38 cm; *Watercolor*

Think in Complementaries

Every color in a sketch is influenced by the color next to it. Colors opposite each other on the color wheel enhance each other and create strong contrasts in a sketch, especially when used at their brightest. Look at how Gérard Darris places full-strength orange and blue next to each other in his sketch of Rennes (below). That touch of blue on the awning makes the orange umbrellas and chairs positively pop.

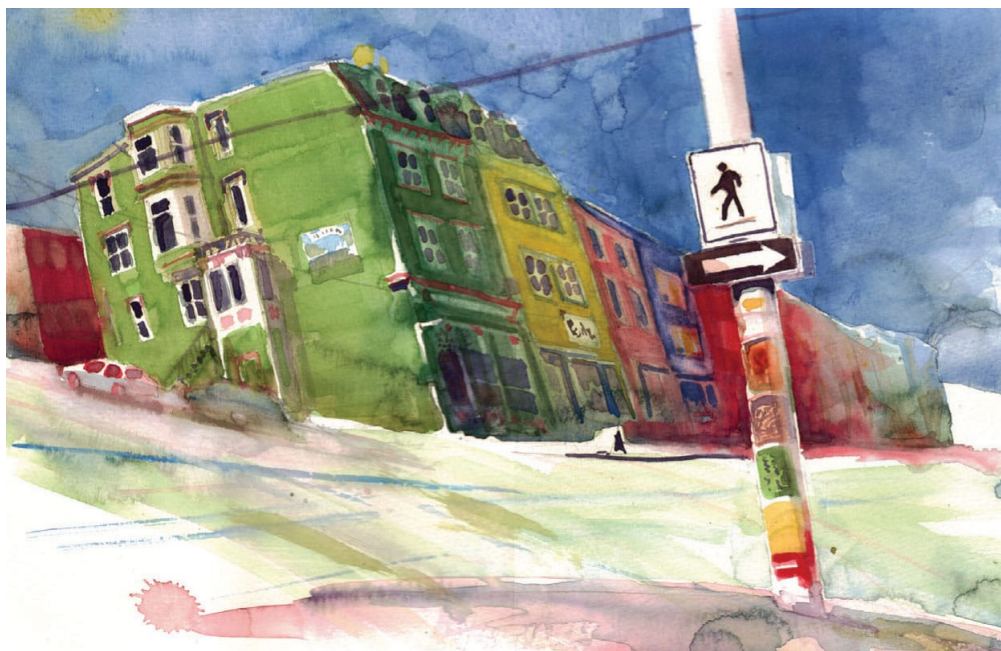


Mike Kowalski alternates tones of warm, glowing yellow in the buildings with cool mauve in the shadows and distant trees.

MIKE KOWALSKI

Maling Road, Melbourne, Australia

9" x 14" | 22.8 x 35.5 cm; Watercolor on Saunders paper



The diagonal thrust of these iconic jellybean houses, and the repetition of saturated reds, greens, and yellows on buildings and pole, give this sketch its remarkable energy.

OMAR JARAMILLO

St. John's, Newfoundland

15" x 11" | 38 x 28 cm; Watercolor



You don't have to cover every inch of paper with pigment. On an early spring day in Rennes, the oranges and blues are concentrated at the center of the sketch, with softer neutral colors on the surrounding structures.

GÉRARD DARRIS

Place Sainte-Anne, Rennes, France

8.25" × 23.6" | 21 × 60 cm; Pigment liners, brush pen, and watercolor

Let Pure Color Shout

Some sketching locations, such as bustling markets and street scenes, positively demand pure color. If you're drawn to busy places like these, then your challenge is to convey the chaos, noise, and movement. Adjacent blocks of primary and secondary hues can create a strong visual vibration, so use color strategically and in its most saturated strength.



Color can have cultural associations. Because "red is auspicious to the Chinese," Singapore sketcher Don Low uses saturated reds and other colors to convey the festivities of Chinese New Year.

DON LOW

Celebrating Festivity at Chinatown, Singapore

14" × 10" | 35.5 × 25.4 cm; Watercolor, Titanium White gouache



To make a strong statement about a particular scene, let one color shout. Here, a jungle of saturated green vegetation makes a loud commotion.

A.RMYTH

Riad, Atrium with Pool

23.6" x 8.25" | 60 x 21 cm; *Watercolor*

Tip

If you want areas of pure color in your watercolor sketches, make sure your paint is fresh. The fresher the paint, the brighter the colors.

Create Variety with Color Intensity

One of my teachers used to say, “Use a good chunk of neutral color in your work. It will make the other colors sing.” I think of that often when I’m out sketching. The eye is naturally drawn to bright colors if they’re surrounded by grays or neutrals. So think about where you want the eye to linger, and let pure color lead the way.



I was drawn to this convenience store because I love painting colorful signs. The gray sky and building positively recede before the spots of pure color.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Valois Corner

8" x 8" | 20.3 x 20.3 cm; Watercolor and pencil



Mike Kowalski uses bright primaries to create a strong focus around people milling in front of a colorfully lit bar and surrounds them with softer neutral tones in the street and buildings.

MIKE KOWALSKI

Checkin' It Out, Hood River, Oregon

6" x 8" | 15.2 x 20.3 cm; Oil

KEY VI

NEUTRAL COLORS

Neutral colors don't get enough respect, often tagged for being dull and boring. But I find transcendent beauty in these colors—the ones you can't really name—the pearly grays and muted browns that resonate with rich undertones.

Neutral colors are the very backbone of urban scenes, and definitely enjoy pride of place in my sketches, which include lots of stone buildings and are often painted on cloudy days. My preferred technique for obtaining luminous grays is to mix them rather than use pigments straight from the tube. This marriage of hues allows me to vary the color temperature of my grays—more blue in the mix if I want a cool neutral, more yellow for a warm one. The variety of grays I'm able to create is almost limitless.

In previous chapters, we pushed color to the limit by using it in its purest form. But in this chapter we'll tone it down a little and whisper instead of shout.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

Cemetery Road

12" × 8.5" | 30.4 × 21.5 cm; *Watercolor and pencil*

Create Your Own Grays

Yes, you can get a perfectly serviceable gray by diluting black paint with water. But it'll be a one-note gray, lacking in warm or cool undertones. I much prefer to create my own warm or cool grays by mixing two or three colors together. That way, I get to paint with an infinite variety of beautifully subtle shades.





For much of the winter in Montreal, shades of gray take over my palette. Here, I use plenty of warm grays for the road and distant woods.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Avenue Ste. Anne

10" x 14" | 25.4 x 35.5 cm; Watercolor

Mixing Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, and Indigo produced the colors for this sketch.



When mixing grays, think about the temperature. Do you want the grays to feel cool or warm? I am clearly starved for heat in this early spring sketch.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Farm Melt

7.5" x 11" | 19 x 28 cm; Ink and watercolor



Feast your eyes at the range of neutral tones and grays Marion Rivolier creates from blue and brown in her bicycle sketch.

MARION RIVOLIER

Cycles in the Museum of Arts and Crafts, Paris, France

12.5" x 9.4" | 32 x 24 cm; Watercolor on watercolor paper

Experiment with Triads

Mix equal parts red, yellow, and blue watercolor and the resulting wash will likely be a fairly neutral gray. I like to experiment with various sets of primary colors because each triad produces a slightly different gray. In fact, there's no end to the luminous grays you can create by varying the pigments in these mixes.

**Organic
Vermilion**



**Yellow
Ochre**



**Cerulean
Blue**





For the soft bluish grays of a snowy road, I mixed Organic Vermilion, Yellow Ochre, and Cerulean Blue. For the purplish shadows, I changed the proportions by adding more red and blue, but less yellow.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Sixth Avenue

10" x 14" | 25.4 x 35.5 cm; Watercolor and pencil

The Gray of a Stormy Sky

Another favorite triad of transparent primary colors is Permanent Alizarin Crimson, Hansa Yellow, and Ultramarine Blue. This makes a perfect gray for rain-covered streets, slate roofs, and threatening skies.

**Permanent
Alizarin
Crimson**



**Hansa
Yellow**



**Ultramarine
Blue**

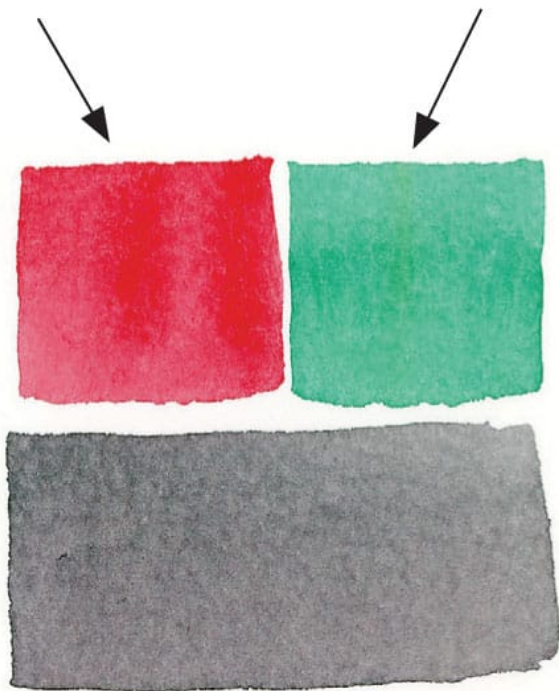


Mixing Grays Is a Balancing Act

Beautifully complex grays can also be obtained from complementary colors. Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Sienna produce a classic neutral gray that's been favored by watercolorists for centuries and can be modulated toward warm or cool gray by adjusting the amount of each pigment. Permanent Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Green also combine for a dark and rich gray that I use when sketching utility poles and electric wires.

**Permanent
Alizarin Crimson**

**Phthalo
Green**



**Burnt
Sienna**



**Ultramarine
Blue**



Not All Grays Are Created Equal

When there's a predominance of neutral color in the scene you're sketching, the key is to vary the neutrals. By that I mean play with different registers of light and dark values, as well as warm and cool neutrals. I start by mixing a big puddle of gray, and as I move through the sketch, I shift the balance by adding more blue or red or yellow to create a range of washes, often allowing colors to mix right on the paper.

Warm Neutral

Cool Neutral



In his watercolor of a plaza in São Paulo, Brazilian artist Renato Palmuti alternates warm and cool neutral tones and saves the spots of pure color for the sunlit areas.

RENATO PALMUTI

Praça do Patriarca, São Paulo

7" x 10.6" | 18 x 27 cm; Watercolor on Saunders Waterford sketchbook



Observe the variety of grays as your eye travels across this sketch: more blue in the sky, warmer in the buildings at left and center, and darker in the foreground concrete blocks.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

Chatham Street

8" x 10" | 20.3 x 25.4 cm; Watercolor and ink

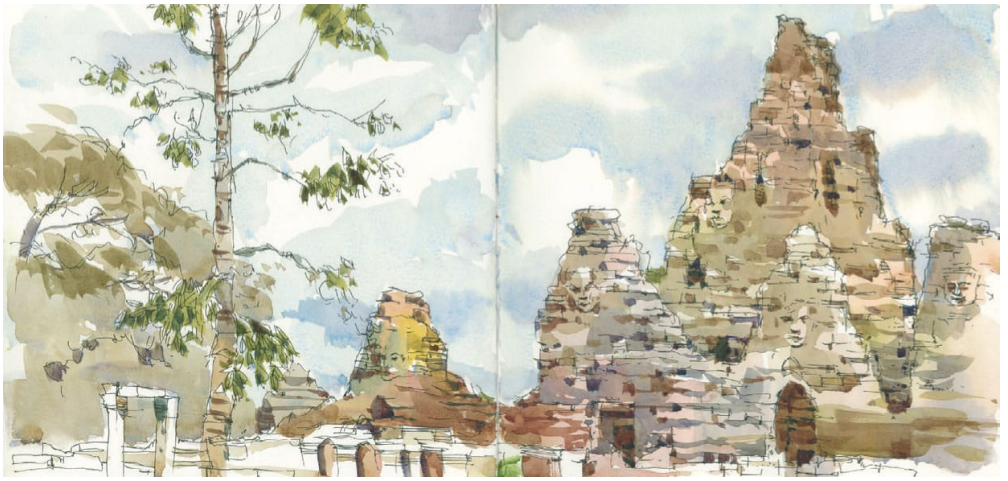
Tip

I never fully clean my palette because I like to add water to the bits of dried paint in the corners, producing gorgeous gray washes with the leftover "mud."

Earth Tones for Texture

I favor earth tones—Raw Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, and Burnt Umber—when sketching warm stone walls, such as the ones in Angkor, Cambodia. Because these granulating pigments often integrate visible particles of synthetic iron oxide, they actually mimic and enhance the texture of the stone in the sketch.





Can you feel the atmosphere in this sketch? The clouds were heavy and the humidity almost a hundred percent when I sketched the bas-reliefs on one of Cambodia's famous Khmer temples.

SHARI BLAUKOPF

The Bayon, Angkor, Cambodia

16" x 8" | 40.6 x 20.3 cm; Ink and watercolor



Ch'ng Kiah Kiean's ink line skips and dances across the page, as he conjures rich, warm tones using Raw Umber and Brown Ochre, along with Payne's Grey and Ivory Black for the wall's shadow areas.

CH'NG KIAH KIEAN

Cité Médiévale, Carcassonne, France

14.9" x 33" | 38 x 84 cm; Triptych, Chinese ink and watercolor on paper

GALLERY I

MOOD & ATMOSPHERE

The next time you sit down to sketch a scene, resist the impulse to plunge right in. Pause for a moment to *observe*. Time of day, light, and weather are in constant flux, and you want to capture some of that. But pause, also, to *feel*. Because if you stop and think about it, you are just as changeable, responding to a scene one way today, and another way tomorrow.

Accuracy to what's in front of you is good, but as a sketcher you are much more than a recording device. You are capturing the *external* mood and atmosphere of a specific place, as filtered through the *internal* mood and atmosphere of a thinking, feeling human being—you. This is why sketching is so personal: because it's at the intersection of physical and emotional forces.

The sketches in this gallery evoke the mood and atmosphere of a unique place, and of a unique sketcher.



SHARI BLAUKOPF

Sanibel Wind

15" × 10" | 38 × 25 cm; Watercolor and pencil



Standing in a sheltered spot, Marion Rivolier used bold brushstrokes and an economical ink line to quickly capture the rush of people hurrying to escape the rain and cold.

MARION RIVOLIER

Les Halles Under the Rain, Paris

5" x 16" | 13 x 41 cm; Watercolor and ink in watercolor Moleskine sketchbook



MARION RIVOLIER

Dusk on Ménilmontant, Paris

9.4" x 12.5" | 24 x 32 cm; Watercolor on watercolor paper

"I love painting sunsets, but the difficulty is to quickly grasp this ephemeral moment. That day, the sky was beautiful, cloudy, with a range of fantastic colored grays. I first laid the orange-yellow of the setting sun and then played with the water and grays, blue and

indigo, to create the clouds.”

—Marion Rivolier



PAT SOUTHERN-PEARCE

Accrington, Lancashire

8.3" × 11.7" | 21 × 29.7 cm; Duke Confucius Fude with black De Atramentis Document ink, broad white Mitsubishi Signo Uniball, Inktense and Caran D'Ache watercolor pencils used without water, Peter Pauper watercolor crayons used dry, Sheaffer fine italic nibbed calligraphy cartridge-filled fountain pen for lettering on Seawhite smooth dark brown mineral card

"I trained as a painter, so I see the underlying colors when I'm sketching, and work all over the page at once. If I have a color in my hand, I'll think, 'Where else can it go?' and dart about the page, feeling it grow beneath my hand. Shapes against the sky—and skies themselves—excite me, with their color and movement, and I'll stop my drawing in an instant if the sky changes and just swish it in!"

—Pat Southern-Pearce



NINA JOHANSSON

View from Kemper Building

7.8" x 11.4" | 20 x 29 cm; Ink and watercolor

"I was struck by all the glass in the skyscrapers in Chicago. Each building had a different tone of glass, some with a tinge of green, some with a blue tone, most of them cool, because they reflected the sky. And because the shaded sides of the buildings were facing me, cool colors seemed to be a good choice for this view."

—Nina Johansson



DON LOW

A Wet Morning in Little India, Singapore

12" x 18" | 30.4 x 45.7 cm; Watercolor on paper, sable brushes

"For my watercolor sketch in Singapore's Little India, done on location, I used a limited palette of Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, and Indigo, with accents of Cadmium Orange. The gradual clearing sky gives a backlit effect to the scene. For shadows, I mixed a variety of browns and grays with the pigments I had with me, balancing cools and warms from foreground to background."



A yellow wall makes a bright contrast to the moody, cool colors in this atmospheric sketch.

DON LOW

Ann Siang Hill, Singapore

iPad Pro, Procreate, Apple Pencil

GALLERY II

LIGHT & SHADOW

Capturing the interplay of light and shadow is the best exercise for developing your skill with concepts we've covered in previous chapters—specifically value patterns and color temperature at different times of day.

Even in a built environment, light and shadows are as changeable as the sky. To be sure, the church you're sketching is a solid object, made of stone and glass and deeply rooted in the earth. But light and shadow change its volume, color, and texture from one minute to the next. What happens when a long shadow extends over several objects and surfaces? How do the values change?

In some sketches, it's really *only* about light and shadows. The building or market square—the ostensible subject—is merely an excuse for capturing the play of slanting shadows and raking light at day's end.

For the best light and shadow studies, sketch in the early morning or late afternoon, when the light is warmest and shadows most dramatic. When I know that shadows will be a critical element in my sketch, I make faint pencil lines early on to indicate their positions. This way, even if the light shifts—and it inevitably will—I've fixed my shadows' location so that the light is consistent across my sketch.



ROOI PING LIM

Laneway in Roussillon

8" x 8" | 20.3 x 20.3 cm; Ink and watercolor



MIKE KOWALSKI

Dory, Port Townsend, Washington

8" x 10" | 20.3 x 25.4 cm; Watercolor on Fabriano paper

“For purples I almost always use Cobalt Blue mixed with Quinacridone Rose, and temper it with a little Quinacridone Gold or Raw Sienna.”

—Mike Kowalski



Shadows can be the main subject of a sketch. The deft brushstrokes reveal a strong shadow pattern, leading the eye across the ground and right to the main focal point of Mike Kowalski's extraordinary café sketch.

MIKE KOWALSKI

The Café Is Open, Abbotsford, Australia

10" x 16" | 25.4 x 40.6 cm; Watercolor on Saunders watercolor paper



The cool color of the shadows makes a strong contrast to the alternating warm tones of the buildings in this lively row of buildings on the square.

TONY UNDERHILL

Charterhouse Square, London

16" x 5" | 41 x 13 cm; Ultrafine Sharpie, water brush, and watercolor on Moleskine watercolor notebook

"My use of colors is totally influenced by the mood of the light in the scene. I use values and contrasts when designing my paintings, and think about color temperature (warms and cools) rather than specific colors." —Renato Palmuti



RENATO PALMUTI

Bairro de Pinheiros

7.2" x 11.2" | 18.5 x 28.5 cm; Watercolor on textured cellulose paper



LK BING

Symphony Light and Shadow

12.2" x 16" | 31 x 41 cm; Watercolor on paper



LK BING

Dramatic Lighting Along the Arcade

8.25" x 11.8" | 21 x 30 cm; Watercolor, soft pastel, water-soluble marker on paper

"A sketch will have more emotional and artistic value if we are able to incorporate dramatic mood or atmosphere in our composition. We can also create an awareness of the serene and dramatic beauty of light and dark with the clever use of light and shadows."

—LK Bing



You can't help but be captivated by the atmospheric watercolors of LK Bing. He is a virtuoso at using dramatic light and shadow to create depth. Don't you feel like you can walk right into one of his scenes?

LK BING

Songoyudan Traditional Market in the Morning

12.2" x 16" | 31 x 41 cm; Watercolor on paper

GALLERY III

EXPRESSIVE COLOR

Pure color has an immediate and almost physical expressiveness, an emotional charge all its own, quite apart from the subject you're sketching. This is why some sketchers will insert a blast of red where there is no red, or a note of bright turquoise. These colors may not reflect what's in the scene, but the sketcher is using color *expressively* and with purpose: to trigger a sensation in the viewer or to make a statement.

Using expressive color is often intentional. Even where the color actually occurs in the scene, the artist is turning up the volume or tone to draw the eye or stir up excitement. As we saw in the previous gallery, expressive color can be so insistent that it becomes the subject of the sketch.



INMA SERRANO

Parque de Mouchao, Tomar, Portugal

8.25" x 11.4" | 21 x 29 cm; Pentel brush pen, Sailor calligraphy fountain pen with De Atramentis Document Black ink, Viviva color sheets in Laloran watercolor sketchbook

Obey Your Own Sense of Color

It's fascinating to sit with a group of sketchers painting the same scene. Once we're done and start comparing, each sketch looks completely different! We've been facing in the same direction, at the same time of day, in identical weather. Yet we've seen and expressed color in remarkably individual ways, channeling our own very different personalities into our work.



Try ignoring the colors you see and introducing your own. Note Inma Serrano's strategically placed bright pinks and reds—even in unexpected places such as the sky. By varying the size of these "rogue" colors, she creates a pattern that dances across the sketch.

INMA SERRANO

San Paedro Kalea, Hondarribia, Guipuzcoa, Spain

11.4" x 16.5" | 29 x 42 cm; Liquid watercolor, fountain pens, colored pencil, mixed-media paper



Painting from a hotel rooftop in Marrakesh, A. Rmyth's bold brushstrokes and fully saturated acrylic color conjure a vibrant panorama of the Atlas Mountains below.

A.RMYTH

Rooftop View, Kasbah Bab Ourika, Morocco

11.7" x 49.6" | 29.7 x 126 cm; Acrylic paint

"Even if I do not have a clearly defined color palette, over the years I have noticed a tonal tendency. Only the color intensity changes, reflecting the intensity of light related to latitude."

—A.RMYTH



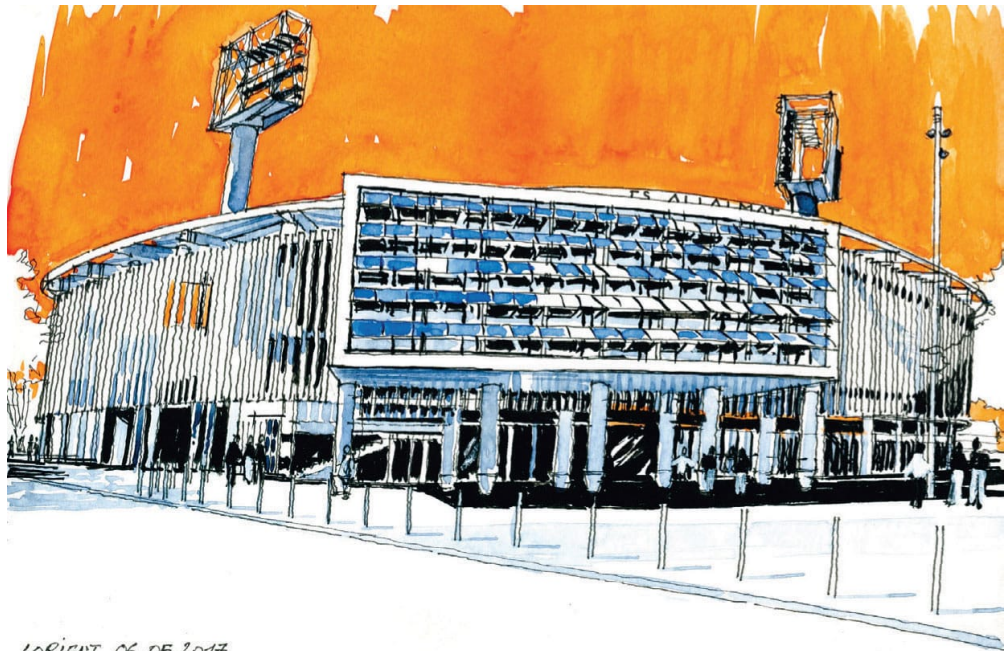
PAUL WANG

Old Blue House in Vientiane, Laos

8.25" x 11.8" | 21 x 30 cm; Watercolor and pencil on hot pressed watercolor paper

"Bright colors are like strong spices. Use them sparingly to accent and highlight."

—Paul Wang



LORIENT, 06.05.2017

GÉRARD DARRIS

Lorient, Stadium Louis Allainmat

11.8" x 8.25" | 30 x 21 cm; Staedtler pigment liners, Pentel brush pen, blue gouache, orange watercolor

"The soccer team of Lorient, nicknamed 'the hakes' (this is an important fishing port!), played this evening. The color of the team's shirt is orange. I chose to mark this dramatic event with an orange sky."

—Gérard Darris

GALLERY IV

OTHER MEDIA

There's a good reason why ink, pencil, and watercolor are the urban sketcher's favorite tools. They're light, fast drying, and eminently portable. But I urge you to experiment. Pick up some markers, gouache, colored pencils, or pastels. Try sketching on toned paper or newsprint. Or borrow an iPad and try sketching with a stylus.

I guarantee you will feel an instant discomfort, maybe even some resistance. But keep at it. Because the moment you leave your comfort zone, old habits fall away, the senses sharpen, and you begin to experience the world with fresh eyes. This can be quite liberating.

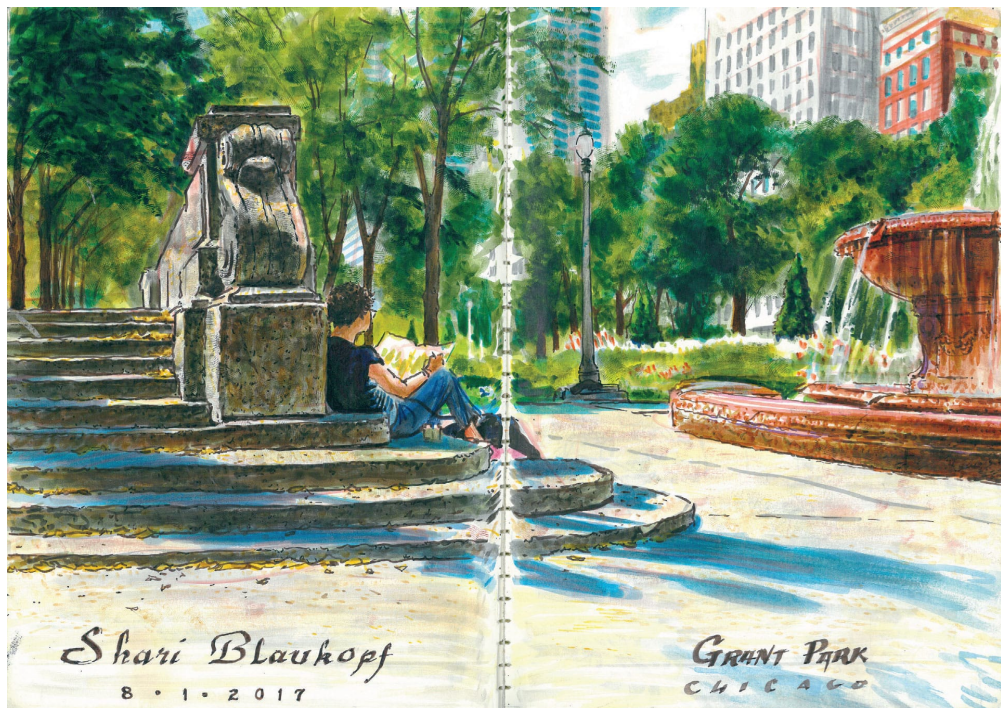
At first, you may have one or two failures—or you may take to the new medium like a duck to water! Either way, you've expanded your range of creative expression and learned something important about yourself and how you view the world. And the next time you pick up your regular tools, you might discover something interesting: You've become a better sketcher.



MARU GODÀS

Sardines at Patio 13, Alfama, Lisbon

16.7" × 9.6" | 42.5 × 24.5 cm; Gouache and acrylic inks



It was a thrill to watch Don Colley work his drawing magic with Pitt Artist pens (after he finished sketching me!). He manipulates the wet pigment from his pens like a watercolorist uses paint, pushing it around with his fingers as it dries. Look closely at his sketches and you'll see dozens of fingerprints.

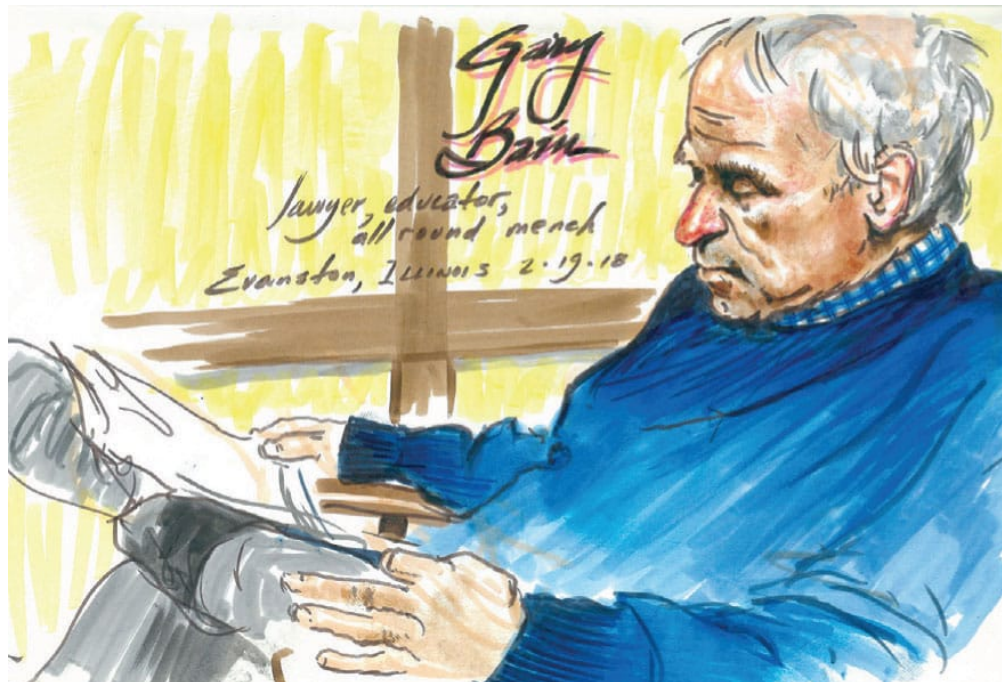
DONALD O. COLLEY

Shari Blaukopf, Grant Park

10.5" × 15" | 26 × 38 cm; Faber-Castell Pitt Artist brush pens on Seven Seas Tomoe River paper

"The paper I use has sufficient sizing to prevent the immediate absorption of the Pitt pens, which are water-based pigmented pens that are waterproof when dry. I have a brief moment to smear or blot the marks before they dry, which softens the contour and thins or lightens the value. Considerable use of my fingers, wiping, smearing, and tapping the pigment once applied to the page, or wiping the brush nib first and then touching the page, add to the variety of marks and surface texture."

—Donald O. Colley



DONALD O. COLLEY

Gary Bain

7" x 10.5" | 17.7 x 26 cm; Faber-Castell Pitt Artist brush pens on Seven Seas Tomoe River paper



If you're accustomed to adding watercolor to your sketches, give gouache a try instead. Add plenty of water and it's transparent like watercolor. But used at full strength, it's opaque, so you

can work from dark to light. This means you don't have to preserve the whites of the paper, as you do in watercolor. In her exuberant sketches, Barcelona artist Maru Godàs uses gouache in combination with colored pencils.

MARU GODÀS

Mercat de Sants (Sants Market), Barcelona

16.7" × 9.6" | 42.5 × 24.5 cm; *Gouache, colored pencils, mixed-media technique*



MARU GODÀS

The coast of Barcelona from Mapfre Tower, 20th Floor

28.5" x 9.8" | 72.5 x 25 cm; Gouache, colored pencils, mixed-media technique

“I love gouache because it helps me transmit the urban environment. It can be very hard and rough, like a factory wall, or bright and happy as a table full of fruit. Gouache has a dual character—sweet and graphic or wild and pictorial.”

—Maru Godàs



For Susanne Strater, the beauty of pastel is that she can keep working over what has come before, making wholesale changes or small adjustments—without ever having to wait for the paint to dry.

SUSANNE STRATER

Red Roof

9" x 9" | 22.8 x 22.8 cm; Pastel on Canson Mi-Teintes pastel paper



WILLIAM CORDERO HIDALGO

Juan Viñas Town, Cartago, Costa Rica

6" x 17.5" | 15.2 x 44 cm; Ink and soft pastel

"I took advantage of the pastel medium's power and expressiveness by using color not as an extension of real color from the rural scene in front of me, but as a way to represent and capture the general atmosphere and sense of place. Bold and fearless strokes can help achieve that. Pastel offers great contrasts, and it glows, making colors more vibrant—not to mention the 3-D effect its rich texture suggests."

—William Cordero Hidalgo



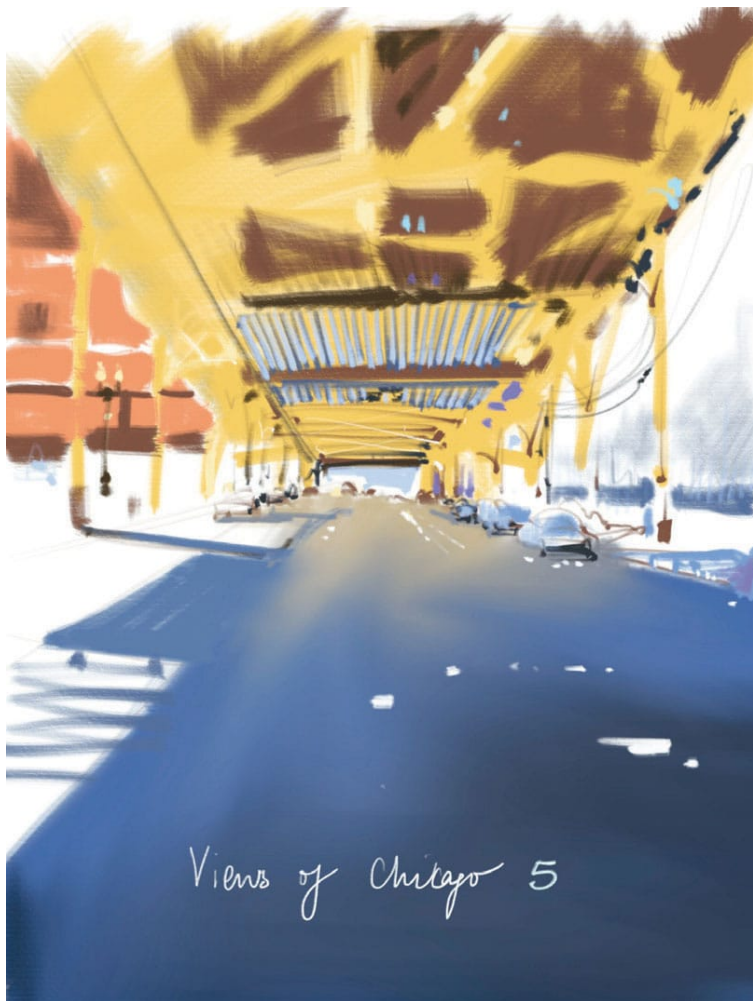
Any excuse for trying new tools is a good one. Rob Sketcherman started drawing on an iPad because his Hong Kong apartment was too compact to store art supplies, and now that's all he uses. Sometimes I have to do a double take when I see his work online. Digital drawing tools have become so sophisticated that sometimes it's hard to tell whether a sketch was created on paper or tablet.

ROB SKETCHERMAN

Colorful Corner in Little India

iPad Pro, Procreate, Apple Pencil

“Working with an iPad is really painting with light and pixels, which allows me to layer pure colors without the muddiness that can result in traditional media. After stroking my lines in with a rough, juicy ‘pen,’ I used a few ‘watercolor’ brushes to broadly splash in background hues before upping the opacity where I wanted colors to pop.” —Rob Sketcherman



Views of Chicago 5

UMA KELKAR

Under the Bridge, Chicago

iPad Pro, Procreate, Apple Pencil

“Using the iPad frees me from worrying about the order in which I apply color. Cool can come first followed by warm, and the water doesn’t become dirty. So I can always get a clean yellow even if it’s the last pigment I use.”

—Uma Kelkar

CHALLENGES

1. ☐ Try a drawing tool you've never used before.
2. ☐ Sketch in a café and use warm colors to capture the room's social liveliness.
3. ☐ Draw on paper that isn't white, such as tan or gray.
4. ☐ Sketch using a ballpoint pen, or two colors of ballpoint pen.
5. ☐ Sketch at dusk to capture the warm tones the setting sun casts on buildings.
6. ☐ Draw your scene directly with a brush instead of a pencil or pen.
7. ☐ Restrict yourself to a limited palette of three primary colors.
8. ☐ Sketch in monochrome, using a tool you've never tried before.
9. ☐ Make shadows your subject, but concentrate on warm and cool areas instead of specific colors.
10. ☐ Use complementary colors in the focal area of your sketch.
11. ☐ Paint the same scene twice, using two value schemes: high-key and low-key.
12. ☐ Sketch trees, but instead of using green paint for the foliage, mix your own greens from blues and yellows.
13. ☐ Draw the background with a different drawing tool than the foreground.
14. ☐ Take artistic license, painting the sky anything but blue or gray.
15. ☐ Sketch in a crowded market and use as much pure color as you can to convey activity.
16. ☐ Create a warm gray and a cool gray, and use both in a single sketch.
17. ☐ Sketch the same scene at different times of day.
18. ☐ Try sketching in just three values: light, midtone, and dark.
19. ☐ Sketch with a water-soluble pencil or pen, adding tone by wetting your lines.
20. ☐ Sketch with watercolor, adding ink lines afterward.
21. ☐ Sketch using an analogous color scheme.
22. ☐ Paint the darkest areas of your sketch first, using a dark you've mixed from a deep red and dark green.
23. ☐ Use both wet-in-wet and dry brush watercolor in a single sketch.
24. ☐ Sketch a night scene on dark paper, using pastel or gouache to add highlights.
25. ☐ Sketch from a high vantage point with a dramatic view of clouds, and think about how to add emotion to the sketch.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

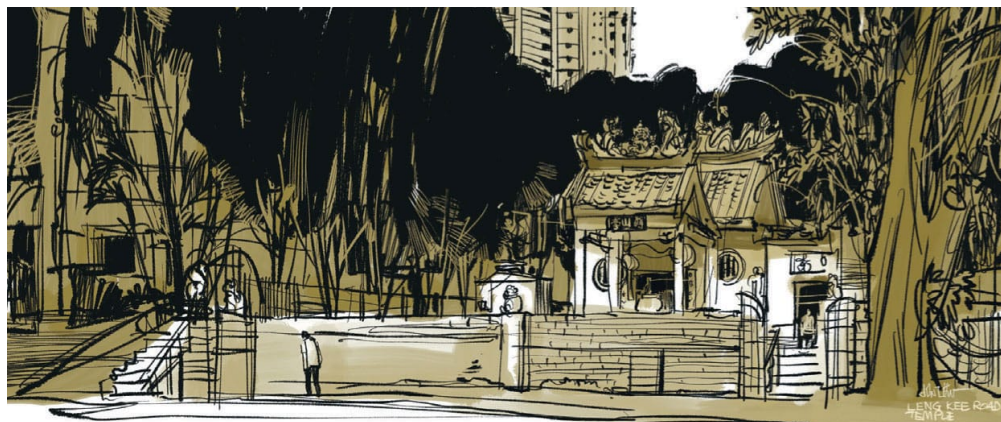


Shari Blaukopf is a sketcher, watercolor painter, college teacher, and art blogger. A signature member of the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, she has works in corporate, government, and private collections around the world. Cofounder of Urban Sketchers Montreal, Shari gives workshops throughout Europe and North America, and has taught at Urban Sketchers Symposia as well as through the Urban Sketchers Workshop Program. Shari grew up and still lives in Montreal, where she continues to discover new neighborhoods in her quest to find the most evocative streets and back alleys to sketch. Her online courses can be found at [Craftsy.com](https://craftsy.com), and you can follow her sketches at www.shariblaukopf.com and www.blaukopfwatercolours.com, and on Instagram @sharisketcher.

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The Urban Sketching Handbook series takes you to places around the globe through the eyes and art of urban sketchers.

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DON LOW

Temple Along Leng Kee Road

iPad Pro, Procreate, Apple Pencil



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